



***United States Attorney
Southern District of New York***

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**CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
HERBERT HADAD, MEGAN GAFFNEY
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600**

**U.S. ARRAIGNS ALLEGED COCAINE KINGPIN
EXTRADITED FROM COLOMBIA**

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today the extradition and arraignment of JOSE MARIA HENAO MEJIA, a/k/a "Don Pepe," a/k/a "El Viejo," ("HENAO MEJIA"), the alleged head of a Colombian cocaine trafficking organization based in Medellin, Colombia, responsible for importing large amounts of cocaine into the United States since at least 1998. HENAO MEJIA was formally extradited from Colombia on September 10, 2004, and will be arraigned before a United States Magistrate Judge in Manhattan federal court later today.

The extradition represents the culmination of Operation Emboscada, an historic joint investigation involving cooperation between the Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA") and the Colombian Government's Department of Administrative Security ("DAS"). Worldwide, Operation Emboscada has resulted in the seizure of thousands of kilograms of cocaine, the prosecution of 21 individuals (17 of whom were prosecuted in the Southern District of New York, and 4 in Spain). According to law enforcement officials, HENAO MEJIA's arrest in September 2002 was the first individual listed as a Consolidated National Priority Organization Target ("CPOT"), a list created by Attorney General John Ashcroft of the world's most notorious narcotics trafficking organizations.

According to a three-count Indictment and the formal request for extradition (the "Extradition Package"), which also charges the previously extradited Efrain Gomez Aristizabel, a/k/a "Orlando Ona Rodriguez," a/k/a "Daniel Ortega," a/k/a "El Peludo," HENAO MEJIA headed a cocaine distribution organization that obtained cocaine by pledging large amounts of HENAO MEJIA's property, in Colombia, to other traffickers to secure the delivery of cocaine in the United States. According to the extradition package and Indictment, HENAO MEJIA's organization operated distribution cells in Spain and throughout the United States, including Miami, Florida, Chicago, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey.

According to the indictment, after HENAO MEJIA pledged

his property for the loads of cocaine, he and his associates in Colombia would receive pager numbers in the United States from the sellers of cocaine, and then arrange with HENAO MEJIA's United States based cells to receive the cocaine in cities throughout the United States. The Indictment also charges HENAO MEJIA with laundering the proceeds of those sales, by having associates deliver millions of dollars in cash to money laundering fronts located in the United States. After these United States-based fronts received the money from HENAO MEJIA's associates, they would contact their money laundering counterparts in Colombia, who would release an equivalent amount of Colombian Pesos to HENAO MEJIA and his associates, it was charged.

According to the extradition package, Operation Emboscada evolved from Colombian based wiretaps of telephones used by HENAO MEJIA and his associates in Colombia, the fruits of which were then used by the DEA to obtain wiretap orders in the United States of HENAO MEJIA's United States-based cells. According to law enforcement officials, Operation Emboscada was the first case in which Colombian wiretaps were used in such a manner.

According to the Extradition Package, HENAO MEJIA was arrested by DAS in Medellin, Colombia, pursuant to a provisional arrest warrant, on September 9, 2002.

If convicted, HENAO MEJIA faces a maximum sentence of life in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison. The Indictment also seeks forfeiture from HENAO MEJIA of

\$2 million.

Mr. KELLEY praised the cooperative investigative efforts of the DEA New York Task Force (comprising DEA agents, New York City Police Department Detectives and New York State Police Investigators), DEA-Bogota, and DAS.

Assistant United States Attorneys NEIL M. BAROFSKY and DAVID N. BERARDINELLI are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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